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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the "Teaching and Learning about Aging" project of the McCarthy-Towne School, Acton, Massachusetts. In its third year of operation, the project is designed to integrate education about aging with the general curriculum for all K-12 students and to promote opportunities for intergenerational contact between people of different ages. The project has been evaluated by the Educational Testing Service and validated for diffusion by the Massachusetts Department of Education. A description of project activities follows. A 30-hour inservice course for teachers has been developed. In the course, teachers explore attitudes about aging and the aging process and related political and economic issues and review models and materials for the classroom. To date 120 teachers have completed this course. Curriculum workshops to help teachers integrate information about aging into their regular curriculum are being conducted for teachers who complete the inservice. The project has developed many publications including a sourcebook for teachers, an analysis kit on "Ageism in Literature," an annotated bibliography of literature on aging categorized by grade levels, and curriculum plans for teachers. To involve the community, the project has sponsored a variety of special programs and events. Senior citizens serve as aides, tutors, guest speakers, and demonstrators of crafts and skills. A resource center library on aging has been developed. The project is now offering its consulting services including teacher training and curriculum materials to other communities which are interested in adopting programs on aging education. (Author/RM)

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TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT AGING
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WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

What is the TLA Project?

Teaching and Learning about Aging is a project of the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District (Acton, MA), developed under a grant from the Elementary Secondary Education Act, Title IV-C. The project is designed to integrate education about aging with the general curriculum for all students (K-12), and to promote opportunities for intergenerational contact between people of different ages.

In its third year of operation (1981-1982), the project was validated for diffusion by the Massachusetts Department of Education. The project is now offering its services and products to other communities which are interested in adopting programs of aging education. Services include teacher training, consultation, and curriculum materials for teachers and learners.

Why is the Project needed?

The children in our classrooms today represent the longest-lived generation of Americans to date. Life expectancy in 1900 averaged only 47 years, and only one of twenty-five people then had passed their 65th birthday. Most young people now can expect to live well beyond their 70th birthday and will become "senior citizens" in a society in which at least one-fifth of the population will be over the age of 65.

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Yet research demonstrates that most young people do not look forward to long life. Growing up in a society that promotes the cult of youth, their understanding of aging is based largely on myth and misunderstanding. They tend to view aging and older people in negative stereotypes and generally take a dim view of their own future as individuals who will grow old.

Children need to learn that people at all ages can enjoy healthy, active and fulfilling lives if they adopt early a lifestyle that combines good habits of mental and physical health with planning for their future. In their adult lives they will have to make difficult decisions on age-related issues that are developing as the age composition of society shifts toward an older population. As tomorrow's voters, parents and grandparents, children need to acquire a better understanding of the alternatives they face as individuals growing older in an aging society.

What are the goals of the Project?

Activities of the TLA Project are designed to achieve the following goals:

1. Raise teacher consciousness of the need for education about aging.
2. Provide teachers with knowledge about aging.
3. Help teachers develop plans for teaching about aging.
4. Provide opportunities for intergenerational cooperation and interaction.

5. Foster more positive attitudes among young people toward aging and older people.

6. Increase understanding of young people about the aging process and related social issues.

7. Help young people prepare for their future as aging individuals in an aging society.

How are teachers involved?

The same myths and misinformation about aging that prevail among young people are to a large extent shared by adults in our society, including teachers. Thus the project places heavy emphasis on in-service programs for teachers who, by professional training and experience, are usually not well prepared to deal with topics of aging in their classrooms.

The project has developed a 30-hour course for teachers which deals with such topics as:

-- The aging process (biological, social, psychological).

-- Attitudes about aging.

-- Historical and cross-cultural perspectives on aging.

-- Age-related social, economic and political issues.

-- Longevity and demographic change.

-- Alternatives for the future.

The course also introduces teachers to a wide variety of print and audio-visual resources for aging education as well as various curriculum models and methods that have proven successful.

By the end of the second year of the project (1980-1981), a total of 120 teachers had completed the in-service course. This included over one-third of all teachers (K-12) in the Acton-Boxborough Schools as well as a substantial number of teachers from other districts who enrolled in the course.

The course will continue to be offered annually in Acton, Massachusetts for teachers in that geographic area. The project is prepared to offer the course at reasonable costs for any school system interested in adopting or adapting the project elsewhere.

How does the Project affect curriculum?

Teachers who complete the in-service course on "Teaching and Learning about Aging" are invited to participate in curriculum workshops. In these workshops, teachers are given individual assistance in developing plans for their own classrooms which will blend some aspect of knowledge about aging with whatever subjects they teach at whatever grade levels (K-12). In this way individualized curriculum plans have been developed for such diverse subjects as social studies, language arts, science, home economics, reading, physical education, mathematics, drama and art. While the curriculum plans are very diverse in terms of content, duration and methodology, all are consistent with one or more goals of the project.

The curriculum plans are field tested, evaluated and revised as necessary, then made available free to other teachers in the local

schools. The project publishes the most successful of the plans and makes them available at a modest cost to educators elsewhere who are free to duplicate the materials without restriction for non-profit educational purposes.

Through this mode of curriculum development, more than 2300 students in the Acton-Boxborough Schools were engaged in some form of aging education in the second year of the project (1980-1981). This included more than half of the district's total school population, grades K-12.

How does the TLA Project involve the community?

The most effective way to overcome myths and negative attitudes that young people may have about aging is to provide opportunities for direct contact between old and young. Age stereotypes and biases frequently dissolve when people of different ages are given the chance to interact. Thus the TLA project encourages both curricular and co-curricular activities which are intergenerational.

The TLA project helps teachers to identify and recruit older volunteers from the community. These volunteers serve as oral history resources, classroom aides or tutors, demonstrators of skills or crafts, and even as co-learners with students. Working with such groups as the Student Council, the Council on Aging, and the Community Education Program, the project has helped to link people of different ages in a variety of special events and activities both on and off campus.

Not only do older volunteers participate in programs at the schools, but students frequently become involved with older people in private homes, the senior drop-in center, housing for the elderly and nursing homes.

as the Project been evaluated?

The project has been professionally evaluated through a contract with Educational Testing Service, and extensive testing was administered to both teachers and students using valid and reliable instruments to measure affective and cognitive change. Comparison of test results for equivalent control and experimental groups demonstrated statistically significant gains for both teachers and students in the direction of project goals.

On August 10, 1981, a validation team composed of professional educators and an independent evaluator made a site visit to the project. They carefully reviewed all aspects of the work done by the project during its first two years with special attention to the evaluation report prepared by Educational Testing Service. Based on the validation team's report, the project was formally validated for diffusion by the Massachusetts Department of Education.

How can the Project serve you?

The TLA Project has drawn attention from educators across the Nation and now maintains contact with hundreds of people throughout the United States who have asked to be notified of products and services as they become available. TLA materials published for teachers and

learners have been widely circulated and are being used in classrooms in several states. Services provided by the TLA Project include:

Resource Center - An ever-expanding collection of print and audio-visual resources is available. The center is open to visitors on all school days from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Within the limitations of budget and staff, the center responds to requests for information or assistance that are received by phone or mail from outside the school district

Publications - The project is in the process of publishing materials for aging education which are available at modest prices. Materials so far available include a sourcebook for teachers, an analysis kit on "Ageism in Literature," an annotated bibliography of literature on aging categorized by grade levels, and detailed curriculum plans for the classroom.

In-Service Course - The in-service course for teachers (see Page 3) is offered periodically in Acton, Massachusetts and is open to any interested person on a tuition basis. Graduate credit is available from the University of Lowell. Arrangements can also be made for the course to be conducted at other locations for an appropriate fee plus expenses.

Presentation and Workshops - The Project Director and staff have conducted presentations and workshops ranging from one hour to several days for dozens of clients both in Massachusetts and other states. Clients have included professional organizations,

school districts and civic groups, with each presentation tailored to the specific needs of the client.

Consulting Services - The Project Director is available for consultation on any matters related to aging education such as teacher training, curriculum design, models and materials for the classroom, etc.

For further information about the project and its services, call or write to:

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